

The Mediterranean around 800: On the Brink of the Second Trade Cycle

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From the point of view of an economic historian, there always were communications in the Mediterranean. There was never a moment in historic times when embassies were not moving from East to West, from West to East. There was never a moment in which the “connectivity” between microregions, for example small-scale cabotage from port to port, was not present, as Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell have recently stressed. And Michael McCormick, also very recently, has put a powerful case for the maintenance of a network of communication of all kinds in the Mediterranean throughout the early Middle Ages, including across the low point for interregional movement, which he would date to ca. 650–780.¹ So, on one level, there is not a problem with the “realities” of interregional relationships, as the symposium title puts it. It does not require so very dense a communications network for one region to influence another in its material culture—a single princess can do it (as with Theophanō and the court culture of late 10th-century Germany), or a single artisan or group of artisans moving to a different region (as with the two-pronged spread of glazed pottery from the eastern Mediterranean to the West, from Constantinople to Rome in the late eighth century and from Iraq to Syria and Egypt, and then to Tunisia, Sicily, and Spain, in the ninth).² It certainly does not require commercial exchange for regions to interconnect at the level of their material culture.

All the same, the “realities” in the title of the symposium give space for an analysis of communications of a more specifically economic type, and on a larger scale than the movements of individuals. Those latter movements, indeed, themselves have different sorts of meaning in environments where there is a high level of interregional exchange with respect to those where communications are rather more reduced. Jerome could go from the West to Bethlehem in 386 without thinking twice about it, and write letters from there

¹ For embassies, see the lists in T. C. Lounghis, *Les ambassades byzantines en Occident* (Athens, 1980), 157–97, 472–77; for connectivity, see P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* (Oxford, 2000), 123–72; for communications in general, see M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy* (Cambridge, 2001), 123–500. The text of this article is essentially that of the paper given at the May 2002 Dumbarton Oaks symposium, with minor revision and footnotes added. I am very grateful to David Abulafia, Pino Petralia, and the anonymous readers for *DOP* for their critiques of the text (see also below, note 19). I shall discuss some of the points made here at greater length in *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), chap. 11.

² For Theophanō, see, e.g., A. Davids, ed., *The Empress Theophano* (Cambridge, 1995); for glaze, see below, notes 18, 24, 28.

without difficulty, with people coming systematically to see him in the next few decades; similarly, Pisans and Genoese and Venetians in 1200 could feel almost as familiar with the Levantine ports as they did with those of Italy; in both cases, their movement was a small part of a normal network of trans-Mediterranean economic exchange, carried out by hundreds of boats a year. Roughly midway between the two, however, when Willibald went from the West to Jerusalem in 723–4, the enterprise, although not unique, was much more of an adventure, and seemed remarkable enough to be written up in detail.³ The valencies of such movements for any cultural interchange would be different as well. Where there is less exchange, the Other is that much more exotic; MTV looks very different if you watch it in a country where you cannot easily buy jeans. Hence, then, the relevance of a discussion of the parameters of economic relationships in this symposium: the economic context is essential for any proper understanding of cultural communication.

The focus of this study is on the very beginning of the period covered in the symposium. I shall look at economic exchange around 800 from the separate points of reference of four regions of the Mediterranean, Egypt, the Levant, the Aegean heartland of the Byzantine Empire, and Italy, so that we can get a sense of how it worked in a period where there was, in fact, relatively little interregional movement of goods: an essential starting point for the developments of the next half millennium. But it is worth beginning with three basic, general, points about how to understand economic exchange, which are important as a framing: one about the different types of exchange; one about the scansion of economic cycles; and one about the importance of regional economies.

It is perhaps useful to see the types of exchange in terms of the two axes of a graph, for there are two, not one, essential typologies for the exchange process. One is the long-standing anthropological distinction between gift exchange, the directed movement of goods which Karl Polanyi called “redistribution,” and commerce. The difference between gift and commerce is a fundamental one, because the former is an exchange designed to create, or maintain, a social relationship, and the latter is an exchange that is for personal profit, and can in principle be between enemies.⁴ There are of course gray areas between them (as when one sells, let’s say, a used car to one’s brother, possibly for less than the market price, or, more edgily, if one mentally tots up the relative value of the Christmas presents given by one’s brother, and compares them to the amount one has oneself spent), but the difference is still a basic one: one creates a social relationship, and the other does not. “Redistribution,” which in our period mostly meant taxation and tribute, has similar gray areas (much tribute is expressed in terms of the rhetoric of gift-giving; much taxation has included forced sales at low prices to the state), but is otherwise equally separate from the other two, and could often be as important a means of exchange as commerce, particularly in the late Roman Empire when huge quantities of grain and olive oil were exported from provinces such as Egypt, North Africa, and Sicily to feed the capitals, Rome and Constantinople, and also sections of the army.

³ McCormick, *Origins*, 129–34; Hugeburc, *Hodoeporicon*, ed. O. Holder-Egger in MGH, SS 15.1 (Hannover, 1887), 86–106.

⁴ The three classic theorists for the social implications of these three types of exchange, gift-giving, redistribution, and commerce, are respectively Marcel Mauss (*The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls [London, 1990]); Karl Polanyi (e.g., in idem, C. M. Arensberg, and H. Pearson, *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* [Glencoe, Ill., 1957], 243–70); and Karl Marx (e.g., in *Capital*, I, chap. 1.4, trans. E. and C. Paul [London, 1930], 43–58). For a recent characterization of the differences, see A. E. Laiou, “Economic and Non-Economic Exchange,” in *The Economic History of Byzantium*, ed. eadem (Washington, D.C., 2002), 681–96.

The other axis for an exchange typology is scale. There are, again, three main levels here on which exchange works: luxury goods, bulk goods, and local small-scale exchange. Local exchange, between peasants in a village or between two villages at a local market, has always existed in every society. Luxury exchange, too, of scarce goods designed to mark out a political or economic élite, has always existed, often across very wide geographical ranges (such as the spice trade from what is now Indonesia into western Europe, which has not been interrupted in the last two millennia),⁵ although its context of course varies dramatically from period to period and place to place, according to the tastes of any given élite. Bulk exchange is the main marker of the scale of economic systems. In the medieval Mediterranean this meant in particular low-cost textiles, ironwork, ceramics, timber, and nonperishable foodstuffs such as grain, wine, and olive oil: goods which in principle could be bought by the majority of people. The artisanal products on this list, textiles (including their raw materials, such as wool), iron, and pottery, could in principle be exported cheaply and in bulk, if demand was high enough, over very wide areas; but communications would have to be very reliable for their price to be low enough to compete with the local productions, usually of inferior quality, which could at a pinch be made in every village. The same is even truer for grain, wine, and oil, which could be grown in nearly every corner of the Mediterranean. If, then, you find African, that is, Tunisian, tablewares in Italy (as you do not in 800, but you do both in 400 and 1000), or Palestinian wine amphorae in Greece, then you have evidence of regional specialisms which were cheap enough and large-scale enough to be exchanged over long distances. This does not tell you to what extent this exchange was commercial or redistributive (i.e., taken in tax), but it does tell you about the scale of economic *systems*, taken as a whole. Luxury exchange does not tell us about systemic scale, by definition: only bulk traffic does that. There are gray areas here too: marble and glass and the cheapest silks—and also slaves, depending on what they were used for—were midway between classic luxuries and the main bulk wares; exotic ceramics could become a luxury (as African tablewares were in sixth-century Britain, or as Chinese pottery was for the ‘Abbāsids); conversely, spices are not a luxury on the Spice Islands. But the conceptual difference between the two is a basic one. And, although luxury exchange has always existed, bulk exchange has not—it rises and falls, reflecting the fact that economic systems do. It may be added here that, before the eleventh-century Cairo Geniza and late twelfth- and thirteenth-century Italian notarial archives give us clear, partly quantifiable, evidence about textiles—and the textiles they document were by no means always from the nonluxury end of the market—the best guide we have to the scale of bulk exchange and thus of economic systems is ceramics, found in archaeological excavations and surveys.

My second general point is simply an observation about cycles. There were three great economic cycles in the Mediterranean and the lands around it in the last two millennia. The third was the western European-dominated, and increasingly Atlantic-orientated, cycle of the modern period, which does not concern us here. The first was that of the Roman Empire, which peaked in its density and scale in the fourth century in the West, the early sixth in the East, and which unified the whole Mediterranean on the level of the exchange of products, more fully in fact than it has ever been unified since. There has long been debate about its intensity, and also about its dating, but in the archaeological world

⁵ See McCormick, *Origins*, 708–16, for their continuities even in the early Middle Ages.

that debate was put to rest by the ceramic syntheses of Tina Panella and others, who have definitively established the scale of the movement of tablewares of all types, together with wine and oil, and therefore probably also textiles, in a complex network that unified all the Mediterranean coasts, and in some places (in Syria and Palestine, for example) a long way inland.⁶ The motor of that cycle was above all the Roman tax system, which underwrote sea traffic, particularly from the main grain-producing regions of the southern Mediterranean. But it was a *trade* cycle too; tablewares were widely circulated as well, although these were not shipped as tax goods; and, when the Vandals broke the Carthage-Rome tax spine in 439, ending the fiscal motor in the West, it took over two centuries for the cycle to wind down. African pottery was still important in Rome in the decades leading up to 700, although by then Rome was one of the few places it reached, and after 700 it stopped.⁷ Similarly, in the more complex eastern Mediterranean network, trade continued after the Persians took Alexandria in 618 and the *embolē* to Constantinople ended, with only a brief revival (we assume) in the 630s—although, there, perhaps counterintuitively, decline was faster, and 700 is a good date for the cessation of most interregional bulk exchange in the East too, judging by the ceramic distributions.

The second Mediterranean trade cycle was that of the central Middle Ages. This cycle can be argued to have had at its core the great cities of the Arab world such as Cairo and Damascus, with the rich production area of the Nile around the former, and, at its height, it integrated trade networks going west to Almería and Seville, northwest to Venice and Genoa, north to Constantinople, and east to Baghdad, the Indian Ocean, and China, as characterized most efficaciously by Janet Abu-Lughod.⁸ This is the cycle that concerns us most directly, but it is also now, in my view, the one whose parameters are least clear: its scale and its timing, in particular, are still to an extent in dispute, largely because the archaeology of this period is less good. As to its timing: it was clearly very active between 1000 and 1350, as Egyptian records first and Italian records later make quite explicit; it seems to have been dominated by Arab shipping in the eleventh century, Italian shipping after that, even allowing for the shifts in the origins of our evidence, which privileges first the one, then the other. When (and why) it declined is not our direct concern here. When it arose is more relevant; although this is still a disputed area, I myself would agree with those scholars who date its initial appearance to the decades around 800—the most authoritative recent defense of this now being, as already noted, Michael McCormick—with a slow but steady increase in scale in the next two centuries up to the notable levels of activity visible in the Geniza around 1000.⁹

⁶ C. Panella, “Merci e scambi nel Mediterraneo in età tardoantica,” in *Storia di Roma*, vol. 3.2, ed. A. Carandini et al. (Turin, 1993), 613–97; other basic texts include J. W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery* (London, 1972); P. Reynolds, *Trade in the Western Mediterranean, AD 400–700*, BAR I 604 (Oxford, 1995); *Economy and Exchange in the East Mediterranean during Late Antiquity*, ed. S. Kingsley and M. Decker (Oxford, 2001). For the scale of textile production, see, e.g., P. van Minnen, “The Volume of the Oxyrhynchite Textile Trade,” *Münstersche Beiträge zur antiken Handelsgeschichte* 5.2 (1986): 88–95, a suggestive article even if based on only one document.

⁷ L. Sagui, “Il deposito della Cripta Balbi,” in *Ceramica in Italia: VI–VII secolo*, ed. eadem (Florence, 1998), 305–30.

⁸ J. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony* (Oxford, 1989). For some of its details, from West to East, see O. R. Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge, 1994); S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 1 (Berkeley, 1967); K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge, 1985).

⁹ McCormick, *Origins*, 508–798. For the dominance of military over commercial factors in the growing role of Italy (up to the 13th century, at any rate), see G. Petralia, “Le ‘navi’ e i ‘cavalli’,” *Quaderni storici* 103 (2000): 201–22.

The scale of this trade cycle at its height is the remit of other contributors to this symposium, but a few remarks about it seem appropriate here. This, unlike the Roman cycle, was a network of exchange between sovereign states. Even the 'Abbāsid caliphate, the largest of them, only ever covered a third of the Mediterranean, and in any case it broke up as a fiscal unit as early as the tenth century. This means that the redistributive element in long-distance exchange was never substantial in the second cycle, except inside the larger and better-organized polities of the period, like the Byzantine Empire in the north-east and the Fāṭimid caliphate in the south; all the rest was commerce. Probably for this reason, the second trade cycle, unlike the first, was not one which put very much stress on the exchange of foodstuffs. Certainly, large cities without a reliable agricultural hinterland, like Constantinople, or Florence after 1250, had to be fed, and had to set up relatively complex networks (partly fiscal in the first case, commercial in the second) to ensure it. Furthermore, agrarian exchange may be understated by the slow decline of the amphora, so easily identified archaeologically, as a means of transporting liquids; olive oil, at least, did continue to be traded. All the same, it is on artisanal products that it is essential to concentrate in this period; the interregional movements of food that the Romans engaged in have never since been replicated on that scale in Mediterranean history.

The third introductory point is a point of principle with relation to our analytical perspectives. Long-distance trade is, as a general rule, less economically important than trade inside major economic regions, Egypt, the Aegean, and so on. This is true even now, as long as we set aside neocolonial dependency (and amalgamate the smallest countries). Even in the global economy of 2004, that is, internal trade is the main motor of economic growth; international trade balances are only one marker of prosperity or recession out of very many. For our period, these statements are a hundred times more relevant. We must not get seduced by the romanticism of the spice trade, or of Venetian galleys and wharves heaving with cloth, into thinking that Mediterranean-wide exchange, even at its height, was much more than froth on the surface. It was more, certainly, for Venice itself, a single city with no political hinterland before the fourteenth century, and for some other entrepôts too; but in our period they were just points on the map. For the great Mediterranean regions, internal exchange was the core commercial activity; and, indeed, long-distance commerce was itself generated, as a spin-off, by the structural coherence and intensity of intraregional exchange. This explains, among other things, the cellular nature of long-distance traffic: moving west from Alexandria, say, around 1000, one passed from an Egypt-Palestine exchange area through a Tunisia-Sicily exchange area (with northern links to Genoa and Pisa) to a Spain-Morocco exchange area. Most really long-distance routes simply linked these smaller interregional groupings together, and few were the boats which went from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. As a result the *grandes routes* could be highly complex and variable, already in the ninth century (and in contrast with the 8th), as McCormick has shown.¹⁰ But even more complex than that were the routes *inside* regions.

It has seemed essential to focus on general and methodological issues for a third of this study. But these last observations can also serve as an introduction to the (necessarily short) sketches of four regional economies. I shall come back to generalization at the end.

¹⁰ McCormick, *Origins*, 501–69.

Egypt is the region of the Mediterranean world whose economy changed least between the Roman world and the central Middle Ages. All the signs we have, both in archaeology and in the rich Egyptian documentation, are of a stable internal exchange economy based on the agricultural wealth of the Nile valley and the ease of transport along the thousand kilometers of the river between Aswān in the south and Alexandria. From the fifth to the eleventh century, Egypt's main tablewares came from Aswān clay, and the various Aswān productions are important at most excavated sites in the period. There was a steady production and commercialization of wine, focused on Middle Egyptian centers like Ashmūnayn (Roman Hermopolis: it had its own fine-ware ceramic productions too), but also most city territories in the middle Nile valley and perhaps part of the Delta.¹¹ Textile production seems always to have been important, with woolens coming from centers in the Nile valley like Bahnasā (Roman Oxyrhynchos) and Qūṣ, and linen coming from the Fayyūm and the Delta.¹² The Delta was also the focus for papyrus production, which must have been a major industrial venture, even though it is relatively ill-documented, until paper came to replace it in the tenth century. These were only the major productions in Egypt and only the major centers; for one thing that is slowly becoming clear from Egyptian archaeology is also the complexity of the hierarchy of regional, subregional, and micro-regional productions in the early Middle Ages (as before and after, indeed).

Underpinning all of these was grain production, with yields sufficiently high to permit a wide range of specialized activity. This grain was also the main focus of Egyptian taxation, in all periods, and one can argue that the coherence and continuity of that taxation was an essential structuring element for the commercial exchange just described. In the late Roman period, the grain tax fed Constantinople and the eastern army, and then Alexandria; in the Umayyad period, by contrast, it seems to have stayed in Egypt, and was focused on the new capital at Fuṣṭāṭ. In the 'Abbāsīd caliphate there was a greater unification of fiscal structures again, for about a century (with 800 in the middle of it), but also a series of serious tax revolts in Egypt, which were not brought under control until the 830s; by the tenth century, Egypt was politically and thus fiscally independent again.¹³ Egypt may in fact not have been forced by the fiscal needs of states to have been part of a Mediterranean or Middle Eastern exchange network for any substantial stretch of time between the mid-seventh century and the Ottoman period. It does not seem to be chance that the archaeological evidence for imports into Egypt, of Tunisian tablewares or Cypriot olive oil, ends in the seventh century as well.¹⁴ The signs we have in the archaeology of ceramics are that, between 700 and the eleventh century, there was only a restricted exchange (never

¹¹ The best current introduction to the range of Egyptian ceramics, with bibliography, is D. M. Bailey, *Excavations at El-Ashmunein*, vol. 5 (London, 1998).

¹² For the 3d century in Oxyrhynchos, see van Minnen, "Textile Trade." For the 9th century in the Fayyūm, see Y. Rāḡib, *Marchands d'étoffes du Fayyūm au IIIe/IXe siècle*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 1982): the documents published there often mention Qūṣ.

For the 10th century, Ibn Hawqal stresses linen above all, though wool as well for Bahnasā: Ibn Hawqal, *Configuration de la terre*, trans. J. H. Kramers and G. Wiet, vol. 1 (Paris, 1964), 135–37, 150–51, 156–57. For textiles in the 11th-century Geniza, see Goitein, *Society*, 1:99–108, 224–28; by now, in a more complex economy, Egyptian flax was often woven into linen in Tunisia and Sicily.

¹³ For tax revolts, see K. Morimoto, *The Fiscal Administration of Egypt in the Early Islamic Period* (Kyoto, 1981), 145–72.

¹⁴ E.g., Bailey, *El-Ashmunein*, 5:1–8, 118–25; P. Ballet and M. Picon, "Recherches préliminaires sur les origines de la céramique des Kellia," *Cahiers de la céramique égyptienne* 1 (1987): 17–48.

absent, but restricted) between Egypt and other regions; Véronique François argues that substantial imports of tablewares into Alexandria (largely from Tunisia at the start) only began again around 1100. The Geniza shows us that a substantial textile trade, again largely with Tunisia and Sicily, had begun by 1000;¹⁵ but it is likely that the eighth to tenth centuries were the low point for traffic to and from the Delta ports. Alexandria was always a hub for the luxury trade, and Egypt remained a complex economy in its internal commercial (and fiscal) exchange; it was internally coherent enough to prosper on its own, without needing external links. It remained internally articulated enough to be open to exchange with other regions, that is. But those other regions would have to have been equally open to an entirely commercial traffic for systemic links to be created, and that process took some centuries to develop.

Syria and Palestine were also potentially very rich, as anyone who has visited their late Roman sites knows. Here, though, economic structures were more fragmented and microregionally diverse—and also harder to pin down after 800 or so, as the archaeology is less good as yet and written documentation scarce. There are considerable debates about when marginal parts of this region began to decline, and I have seen all of 550, 650, 750, 850, and 950 canvassed by at least someone. In exchange terms, there is no doubt that the region as a whole remained highly active, throughout the Middle Ages. But, as just noted, it was much less of a coherent whole than was Egypt; the complexities of its geography would ensure that. In the late Roman period, the Palestinian coast and the hills behind Antioch, major wine and olive oil producers respectively, exported widely across the eastern Mediterranean. These were (with Tunisia) perhaps the parts of the Mediterranean most dependent on export at the height of the first trade cycle. When that cycle ended, the Levantine coast seems to have gone into crisis, with urban depopulation and in some places rural abandonment after 700 or so, except perhaps for the port of Caesarea, which had good links with the interior.¹⁶ Internal sectors of Syria and Palestine, on the other hand, seem to have maintained their prosperity in the Umayyad period and often much later. Local ceramic productions, often of very high quality, continued into the eighth and ninth centuries; new ones appeared, like Mafjar ware, which was distributed, largely in the Jordan valley, from 750 onward. But their scale was in nearly every case very small, and none had a regional distribution across the whole Levant. One could suppose that textile production and distribution, another long-standing strength of Syria and Palestine, remained equally locally restricted; wine production, as we can see from (for example) the latest Late Roman 5 amphorae, certainly was.¹⁷ What seems to have happened in this region between the early seventh century and the mid-eighth is that the end of the Roman

¹⁵ V. François, *Céramiques médiévales à Alexandrie* (Cairo, 1999), 9, 13–19, 157, 181; Goitein, *Society*, 1:101–5, 153–55, 224–26 for the Geniza.

¹⁶ For guides to the enormous bibliography, see C. Foss, “Syria in Transition, A.D. 550–750,” *DOP* 51 (1997): 189–269; J.-P. Sodini and E. Villeneuve, “Le passage de la céramique byzantine à la céramique omeyyade en Syrie du Nord, en Palestine et en Transjordanie,” in *La Syrie de Byzance à l’Islam, VIIe–VIIIe siècles*, ed. P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (Damascus, 1992), 197–218; A. Walmsley, “Production, Exchange and Regional Trade in the Islamic East Mediterranean,” in *The Long Eighth Century*, ed. I. L. Hansen and C. Wickham (Leiden, 2000), 263–343. For Caesarea, see most recently A. Raban et al., “Land Excavations in the Inner Harbour (1993–4),” in *Caesarea Papers 2*, ed. K. G. Holum et al., *Journal of Roman Archaeology* suppl. ser. 35 (Portsmouth, R.I., 1999), 198–224.

¹⁷ For the scale of fine-ware distribution, see Walmsley, “Production, Exchange,” 321–26. For the scale of amphora distributions, see, e.g., *ibid.*, 326–29; P. Watson, “Change in Foreign and Regional Economic Links

fiscal system meant the end of any systematic unification of the region at the level of exchange. The Umayyads still taxed, of course; but their fiscal territories in Syria and Palestine were very small. Here, too, it was not until the 'Abbāsids that any large-scale fiscal reunification was achieved, and by then of course that unification did not focus on the Mediterranean, but, rather, on Iraq.

A particularly popular date for the economic decline of Syria and Palestine is 750, when the 'Abbāsids removed political centrality from the Damascus area and a serious earthquake had just devastated the center of the region. But in commercial terms, one would have to say the opposite: the period around 800, and onward into the ninth century, was a period of expansion of the geographical scale of exchange. We find Iraqi fine tablewares in the Levant for the first time then, first and foremost the polychrome glazes of Raqqa and other centers to the East, which began (in imitation of Chinese ceramics) around the start of the ninth century, and were soon copied in Syria too; other good-quality wares followed.¹⁸ I would attribute this geographical expansion to the integrative power of 'Abbāsīd fiscal centralization focused on Baghdad, which greatly increased the intensity of Syria/Palestine-Iraq traffic. What is important here is that the Levant, although divided shortly before 800 into a series of very localized economies, nonetheless maintained enough productive complexity, and, I would therefore hypothesize, sufficient demand, in urban centers like Jerusalem or Tiberias or Jericho or Ḥimṣ or Aleppo, to be able to react quickly to the stimulus of 'Abbāsīds fiscal recentralization. But, from a Mediterranean standpoint, this exchange revival looked the "wrong" way, that is, to Iraq. Aleppo was the great center of central medieval northern Syria, not Antioch; 'Aqaba in the far south, not Gaza. Syria and Palestine after 800 were in this respect like Egypt, although for different reasons: the region's prosperity no longer depended, or did not yet depend, on a Mediterranean opening. All the same, once the Levant was economically unified, it would be well able, in terms of the complexity of its economic structures, to react to Mediterranean exchange possibilities, should these come to exist.

The Aegean heartland of the Byzantine Empire was in some respects the exact opposite of this Syrian pattern. It is hardly necessary here to rehearse the depth of the political and economic crisis of the seventh century for the Byzantines, which was only tentatively being reversed in the decades on either side of 800 by emperors like Constantine V and Michael II. In exchange terms, too, this latter period is as yet far from properly understood, and consensus about it is incomplete. Archaeological datings are often unclear and disputed, and good sites are few. A very tentative reading of the ceramics of the Aegean, however, might allow us to envision an exchange system around 800 that operated on two levels. One was localized, and consisted of sets of fairly unambitious pottery types, such as the painted wares of Gortyn and Pseira, and the (separate) painted wares of the east coast of mainland Greece. Most particularly, in several parts of Greece, ceramic production was restricted to handmade wares, a productive simplification which has almost no parallels

with Pella in the Seventh Century A.D.," in *La Syrie*, 233–48; J. Magness, *Jerusalem Ceramic Chronology, circa 200–800 CE* (Sheffield, 1993), 160–61, 221–31. For Majjar ware, not well studied as a type, see as a starting point eadem, "The Chronology of Capernaum in the Early Islamic Period," *JAOS* 117 (1997): 481–86, at 484.

¹⁸ Walmsley, "Production, Exchange," 329–31; A. Northedge, "Les origines de la céramique à glaçure polychrome dans le monde islamique," in *La céramique médiévale en Méditerranée. Actes du 6e congrès* (Aix-en-Provence, 1997), 213–23, who puts the dates slightly later.

anywhere in the early medieval Mediterranean—one has to go as far as southeastern Spain to find a well-studied comparator. (I leave aside an ethnic reading of this handmade ware as Slavic, a view which I believe recent work has disproved; but the argument about productive simplification holds, whoever made the pottery.)¹⁹ These sorts of pottery were part of exchange networks which were very simple, very small-scale, and which reflected low and probably intermittent demand. They reflected relatively simple societies, in which wealth (and thus, arguably, aristocratic power) was relatively restricted, at least in the now-Greek parts of the Aegean—the crucial Turkish coast has as yet had few studies of this kind. These are markers of crisis that we do not see in the Levant and Egypt to anything like the same degree.

On the other hand, there were some wider networks as well. The Glazed White ware of Constantinople, which began to be made in around 600 and continued throughout our period, can be found in several of the southern islands of the Aegean, notably Crete, and east to Cyprus, in the eighth and ninth centuries. Post-Late Roman 2 globular amphorae are found in eighth-century levels at Sparta, Aigina, Gortyn, and Pseira on Crete, as well as at Constantinople and even in Italy; it is too early to say whether they are in the same fabrics, and it would not be very likely, but they mark a continuing network of exchange, probably of wine, across medium distances at least.²⁰ This medium-distance exchange was only marginal to local economies, but it did exist. It seems to have privileged the islands, and also major political centers in Greece; one would presume that, on the Turkish coast, at least Smyrna and Ephesos (with its big *panēgyrion* in 795) were part of the network. It must have been a partly commercial network, as with the Ephesos fair, and it is plausibly that described in the provisions for merchants in the *Rhodian Sea Law*. But the importance of political centers in it, not least the capital of course, allows us to conclude, with John Haldon, that the state had a crucial role in keeping such exchange going.²¹ The Byzantine fiscal structure remained centralized, and represented in itself a continuous focus of demand, even if aristocratic wealth was temporarily lessened, at least in some areas.

The Aegean must have been, at the microregional level, much simpler economically than the local economies of the Levant in 800, thanks to the seriousness of the seventh-

¹⁹ See for these localized wares N. Poulou-Papademetriou, “Βυζαντινή κεραμική από τον ελληνικό νησιωτικό χώρο και από την Πελοπόννησο (7ος–9ος αι.),” in *Οι σκοτεινοί αιώνες του Βυζαντίου (7ος–9ος αι.)*, ed. E. Kountoura-Galake (Athens, 2001), 231–66, esp. 236–37; for handmade wares, see E. Anagnostakes and N. Poulou-Papademetriou, “Η πρωτοβυζαντινή Μεσσήνη (5ος–7ος αιώνας) και προβλήματα της χειροποίητης κεραμικής στην Πελοπόννησο,” *Symmeikta* 11 (1997): 229–322; cf., for north of the Danube, F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs* (Cambridge, 2001), 233–34, 285–310. For Spanish parallels, see S. Gutiérrez Lloret, *La cora de Tudm̄r de la antigüedad tardía al mundo islámico* (Madrid, 1996), 187–98. I am grateful for the advice and criticism of Archie Dunn, Sharon Gerstel, and Andrea Berlin; they point out to me the very provisional nature of the data.

²⁰ J. W. Hayes, *Excavations at Saraghane in Istanbul*, vol. 2. *The Pottery* (Princeton, 1992), 18, 71–72; Poulou-Papademetriou, “Βυζαντινή κεραμική,” 238–40, 245–47; P. Arthur, “Early Medieval Amphorae, the Duchy of Naples and the Food Supply of Rome,” *PBSR* 62 (1993): 231–44.

²¹ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1883–85), 1:469–70; *Nomos Rodiōn nautikos*, *The Rhodian Sea Law*, ed. W. Ashburner (Oxford, 1909), chaps. 3, 9–11, 15, 22–25, etc.; J. F. Haldon, “Production, Distribution and Demand in the Byzantine World, c. 660–840,” in *The Long Eighth Century* (as above, note 16), 225–64. For the next period, É. Patlagean, “Byzance et les marchés du grand commerce, vers 830–vers 1030,” *Settimane* 40 (1993): 587–632. A. E. Laiou, “Exchange and Trade, Seventh–Twelfth Centuries,” in *Economic History of Byzantium* (as above, note 4), 697–770, discusses the whole period; she gives more weight to commerce not directed by the state, but does stress the importance of state demand and administration for the wider level of the Byzantine exchange network (e.g., at 713, 735–36).

century crisis there; but it was also more of an economic unit than was Syria and Palestine. The Aegean is one of the great natural exchange regions, of course, thanks to its largely landlocked sea and scatter of islands, but it remains striking that the geographical range of the movement of at least a few goods between Constantinople and Crete (and beyond) was much larger than anything visible in Syria before the introduction of polychrome glaze. Indeed one could expect Glazed White ware from around 800 to be found even in Sicily, once urban excavations there properly get going; possibly in Venice, for that matter. The Arabs, not the Byzantines, were the main motor for the second trade cycle, in that they were overall much richer, and thus were the most secure focus of demand; but the Byzantine fiscal system could nonetheless be argued to be the structure which did the most to further at least a minimum of bulk traffic across substantial distances in the Mediterranean at the very start of the cycle, around 800.

Italy was almost as fragmented as the Levant in 800, and less prosperous for the most part (although exchange there remained more articulated than on the local level in the Aegean). Like Syria and Palestine, it had been fully integrated into the Mediterranean exchange network in the Roman period, and fell apart into numerous economic microregions afterwards, a fragmentation that was much more total because of the extreme political disunity in the peninsula (even after Charlemagne's conquests, there were still at least six separate polities there), and because of the end of state fiscality by 800 in every region except Byzantine Sicily and Calabria. Recent archaeology shows us a set of very small-scale ceramic networks, particularly in northern and central Italy, and pottery production, although always technically competent, was in this period unambitious in quality. We also know from documentary evidence that aristocrats in most of Italy were fairly small-scale, with their lands geographically restricted, which meant that the level of their demand and its geographical scale could be presumed to be relatively restrained; only rulers (including popes) were richer, and they could not, without tax networks, sustain regional economic systems on their own.²² Nor, indeed, would this change soon; Italy's bulk economy remained in most places fairly localized well into the tenth century.

I have discussed Italy's economic fragmentation elsewhere, and the good quality of the archaeology of the period makes it reasonably uncontroversial. Here, however, we need to recognize two exceptions. One is Venice, which was by 800 developing as the focus of exchange using the Adriatic route, thanks to its privileged political links to Constantinople and established commercial link to Alexandria. (The Adriatic did not crystallize as an economic subregion in its own right until the tenth century.) McCormick has convincingly argued that Venice's economic importance came from the slave trade, with the city acting as a "port of trade" (in Polanyi's terminology), funneling slaves south from the Carolingian wars and eastern luxuries back north into Francia. Venice has been the focus of scholarly attention, of course, as long as medieval economic history has been studied, and its rise has often been seen as a metonym for economic development as a whole. I would prefer to stress its inconvenience for bulk traffic, which, if not destined for north Italian markets, had to cross the Alpine mountain barrier to get anywhere else, with serious cost implications for transport. Venice is best placed for luxury, not bulk, traffic between the Mediter-

²² See in general C. Wickham, "Early Medieval Archaeology in Italy," *Archeologia medievale* 26 (1999): 7–20; idem, "Aristocratic Power in Eighth-Century Lombard Italy," in *After Rome's Fall*, ed. A. C. Murray (Toronto, 1998), 153–70.

anean and northern Europe; bulk goods could always move much more easily up the Rhône, which however is hardly documented as a transport spine between 700 and 1000.²³

Perhaps more significant was the southern Tyrrhenian coast, from Rome down to Sicily. This had long been a recognizable subregion, that of the senatorial landowning of the late Roman world, although that scale of landed wealth had entirely gone by 800. But exchange nonetheless continued. Rome's glazed pottery, Forum ware, a new development of the late eighth century, can be found throughout the Tyrrhenian area in the ninth; Neapolitan wine amphorae have been found from Rome to Sicily; Calabrese amphorae have nearly as wide a range; Sicilian oil lamps can be found in Rome.²⁴ This exchange, between microregions which kept their local economic identities as well, recalls that of the Aegean, but here it must be commercial, for it was between independent states. It survived the Arab conquest of Sicily, too. It is not surprising that the same area saw the development of the trading cities of the Naples area in the ninth century, most notably Amalfi; here, at least, there was a commercial exchange network already in existence. It was the only one in the western Mediterranean in 800 that we know of that involved bulk goods on even a small scale, and its only seaborne analogue in that respect is the fiscally backed network of the Aegean. It must be remembered, nonetheless, that both of them pale into insignificance when compared to the scale and complexity of the traffic up and down the Nile.

The Mediterranean was quiet enough in 800, and above all consisted of a set of regional economies, with little link between them, of widely differing levels of economic complexity. Had the space been available to present similar potted accounts of the rest of the western Mediterranean, it would have been necessary to discuss even more extreme examples of microregional fragmentation and simplification, in France, Spain (above all), and on the African coast, with little sign of exchange activity visible in 800 even in the traditional agrarian powerhouse of Ifrīqiya, modern Tunisia. Sicilian archaeology is poor for this period, but it is likely that Sicily maintained its position as the hinge of all East-West traffic, which its geographical location and agricultural potential both grant it. The complexity of its coinage in the last years of Byzantine rule, recently analyzed by Cécile Morrisson, is a marker of its continuing importance for the Byzantine state, probably as a grain reserve for Constantinople; after its conquests by the Aghlabids of Ifrīqiya, from 827 onward, its structural links to North Africa similarly became important; and all the while it maintained commercial links with the rest of Italy. When more excavations take place there, we will have a better barometer of the scale of Mediterranean exchange as a whole than we currently have.²⁵ Even in Sicily, though, what we so far know does not encourage

²³ For Venice, see McCormick, *Origins*, 330–35, 523–31, 729–77. For the weakness of the Rhône corridor, see S. Loseby, "Marseille and the Pirene Thesis, II," in *The Long Eighth Century* (as above, note 16), 167–93; and, implicitly, C.A.T.H.M.A., "Céramiques languedociennes du haut moyen âge (VIIe–XIe s.)," *Archéologie du Midi médiéval* 11 (1993): 111–228, at 122–25.

²⁴ L. Paroli, "La ceramica invetriata tardoantica e medievale nell'Italia centro-meridionale," in *La ceramica invetriata tardoantica e altomedievale in Italia*, ed. idem (Florence, 1992), 33–61; Arthur, "Early Medieval Amphorae"; F. Ardizzone, "Rapporti commerciali tra la Sicilia occidentale e il Tirreno centro-meridionale nell'VIII secolo alla luce del rinvenimento di alcuni contenitori di trasporto," in *II congresso nazionale di archeologia medievale*, ed. G. P. Brogiolo (Florence, 2000), 402–7.

²⁵ C. Morrisson, "La Sicile byzantine," *Numismatica e antichità classiche* 27 (1998): 307–34; cf. in general Haldon, "Production, Distribution," 245–47; for archaeology, see A. Molinari, "Le campagne siciliane tra il peri-

us to see interregional exchange around 800 as more than marginal. On the all-important level of bulk goods, this was an age of internal exchange above all—indeed, in many parts of the Mediterranean, of microregional exchange networks; regions were only linked together at all by a thin veneer of luxury traffic, and by the permanent movement of small boats from one port to the next, which never ended.

It is in this framework that these four brief case studies of regional exchange have been outlined (brief to the point of sketchy, and, it is necessary to underline, subject to considerable disagreement at the level of detail). To conclude, we must ask what these regional pictures contribute to an understanding of how the second trade cycle actually developed. Here I should like to make five main points.

1. The eastern Mediterranean in 800 was substantially richer, with more complex regional economies, than the West; this had in fact been true since 450, and would remain true until at least the twelfth century. In the East, the southeastern, Arab, regions were richer than the northeastern, Byzantine, regions, with Egypt by far the most complex economy in the Mediterranean. Those historians of the second trade cycle who see Egypt as its Mediterranean focus are in my view correct, and this central position would already have been visible in 800 to anyone skilled at predicting future economic trends. That said, it is worth repeating that the most articulated *maritime* exchange areas in 800, the Aegean and the south Tyrrhenian coast, were not under Arab rule. It is significant that the eighth-century “trunk route” of East-West Mediterranean communications, identified by McCormick on the basis of quite different types of evidence from those used here, connected precisely these two regions; it was also along that route that Rome got glazed pottery technologies from Constantinople in the eighth century.²⁶

2. It was stressed earlier that the second trade cycle, unlike the first, was not driven by fiscal networks. But, *inside* regions, tax-based movements of goods contributed substantially to economic coherence: in Egypt, the Aegean, and then in the Levant after 800 or so. That is, the regional networks which commercial exchange would be linking together by the eleventh and twelfth centuries were, internally, made more complex by fiscal needs, and thus more open to interregional commerce. The steady increase in complexity in southwest Mediterranean regions after 800 or so, in Ifrīqiya or al-Andalus, could similarly be said to have fiscal motors; out of the main Mediterranean regions, only Italy prospered internally for purely commercial reasons. So the state, having been firmly shown the door as an economic motor with the breakup of the Roman Empire, returns through the window; its continuing relevance should not be underestimated.

3. In the ninth century, longer-distance traffic revived. This largely depended on the wealth of the two greatest powers of the time, the Carolingian empire and the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, neither of which was based in the Mediterranean, although both of them controlled substantial sections of the Mediterranean coastline. The central regions of these two states, the Seine-Rhine region and Iraq, contained wealthy people, and thus demand, which eclipsed anything in the Mediterranean in 800 (outside Egypt, anyway, and probably also the Marmara microregion around Constantinople). The links between the Carolingians and the ‘Abbāsīds fueled the rise of Venice, and also the expansion in the num-

odo bizantino e quello arabo,” in *Acculturazione e mutamenti*, ed. E. Boldrini and R. Francovich (Florence, 1995), 223–39.

²⁶ McCormick, *Origins*, 502–8; for Forum ware, see Paroli, “La ceramica invetriata.”

ber of sea routes in the ninth century. But it needs to be stressed that this revival was in luxury commerce, not bulk goods; indeed, even the slaves which went southeast to pay for spices and silk were in the luxury bracket for the most part, for Arab agriculture did not use slave labor. This greater activity in the ninth century laid the ground plan for a larger-scale trade cycle, but did not as yet constitute it. Hence the importance of Venice in it, a good port of trade for luxuries for the Frankish lands, but at the end of something of a cul-de-sac for bulk goods—although it has to be said that when the international textile trade of the central Middle Ages did get going, Venice was an established geopolitical point of reference, and cloth merchants who used it had to cope with the Alps as best they could. But even that trade was not really in low-cost textiles for the most part; and in any case by then (by 1100, say) northern Italy had itself become a fast-growing and complex economic region, and a source of demand and production in its own right.²⁷

4. Conversely, the regional wealth in the Mediterranean areas that did exist in 800, particularly in Egypt, was not particularly focused on the Mediterranean as a maritime space. What would be necessary for the expansion of bulk trade with Egypt was less the increasing density of the luxury network just referred to, and more the internal development of other regions, so that they became sufficiently complex and open to the sea for Egyptians to be persuaded that they were worth considering as equal trade partners. As other regions did become more internally complex, that is to say, they offered more opportunities for longer-distance bulk trade between them. This trade would follow the routes of the luxury traders, but had a different dynamic. Although the first interregional connections, in 800, were arguably between the Tyrrhenian and the Aegean seas in the north, the largest-scale connections by 1000 seem to have been in the south, between the Tunisia-Sicily axis and Egypt. This statement is largely dependent on the Geniza material, but it fits what we know of the archaeology of glazed pottery too. Tunisia had been the richest region in the western Mediterranean in the fourth century, and by the tenth century, thanks in part to its renewed links with Sicily, it began to reclaim that position. We can see it exporting glazed ceramics into the Tyrrhenian sea area by the late tenth century, just as it had exported tablewares in the fourth. It became, that is, just the sort of region that Egyptians might trade with, and by the eleventh century it had established bulk exchange links, in cloth, olive oil, glass, and (later) ceramics, with the Nile valley.²⁸ Spain,²⁹ Italy, and

²⁷ See P. Jones, *The Italian City-State* (Oxford, 1997), 173–204, for a recent authoritative overview.

²⁸ Goitein, *Society*, 1:101–20. For Tunisian ceramic exports, see G. Berti and L. Tongiorgi, *I bacini ceramici medievali delle chiese di Pisa* (Rome, 1981), 162–75; for production, see A. Daouatli, “La céramique médiévale en Tunisie,” *Africa* 13 (1995): 189–204. For general Tunisian prosperity, see C. Vanacker, “La géographie économique de l’Afrique du Nord selon les auteurs arabes, du IXe siècle au milieu du XIIe siècle,” *Annales ESC* 28 (1973): 659–80. Glaze came in from Iraq (cf. note 18 above), and had reached Egypt in the 9th century, as the Istabl’Antar excavations in Cairo show: C. Vogt, “Les céramiques omeyyades et abbassides d’Istabl’Antar-Fostat,” in *La céramique médiévale, 6e congrès* (as above, note 18), 243–59, at 248–50. In the later 9th century it spread to Tunisia and Spain (e.g., Gutiérrez, *La cora*, 191–94); in the mid-10th century to Sicily (A. Molinari, “La produzione e la circolazione delle ceramiche siciliane nei secoli X–XIII,” in *Atti del V colloquio internazionale sulla ceramica medievale nel Mediterraneo occidentale* [Rabat, 1995], 191–204). This westward shift in technology parallels the northern, Constantinople to Rome, movement in glazed pottery a century earlier, but it occurs in a framework of a far denser network of exchange by now. Ibn Hawqal’s late 10th-century geography describes the latter well (Ibn Hawqal, *Configuration*, vol. 1); note that he knew relatively little about the northern Mediterranean (1:190–200).

²⁹ See in general for Spain Constable, *Trade and Traders*, 31–37 and *passim*.

the Aegean gained full economic coherence as regions a little later, but, when they did so, they associated themselves with this bulk exchange system as well, and the second trade cycle was fully under way.

5. These empirical observations are based on one specific point which was made earlier, but which is important enough to end with: the major exchange networks were *inside* regions. The development of the second trade cycle was a spin-off of the increasing internal development of several regions, and the resultant possibilities for regional specialization and interdependence (Egyptian flax or linen for Italian wool or woolens, for example), although these were always incomplete. But this then forces us to ask what were the motors for internal development inside regions. I would argue that these were always two: the strength of the regional fiscal network, and aristocratic demand. The complexity of economic systems in general, that is, depended on the wealth of the ruling classes, and that in its turn, in a world still dominated by agriculture, depended on the ability of states and landowners to exploit the peasantry. This takes us into areas of analysis that cannot be developed here, but it is worth keeping in mind that the scale of activity of the cloth-laden argosies of Venice and its analogues—and, of course, of all the luxury and cultural exchange of the central medieval Mediterranean—depended in the last analysis on the scale of tax- and rent-taking from the peasantries of the Nile, the Maeander, the Arno, and indeed the Tigris and the Rhine: a less romantic and less maritime image, but ultimately the crucial structuring element for all medieval economic systems.

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